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THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

TRUTH AND SURVIVAL VALUE

AN editor with a sense of humor can sometimes produce an exquisitely funny effect by the mere juxtaposition of the views he publishes. Thus if one writer is rash enough to declare that "no sane person can possibly believe such an absurdity," he can open his columns to another who vigorously advocates this same "absurdity." I somewhat suspect, therefore, that the arrangement of Vol. XIV., p. 653, was not wholly fortuitous. For on that page the conscientious reader may find, at the end of a somewhat complicated and thorough argument of mine, the conclusion that it is possible to arrive "by a purely Aristotelian route at the humanist contention that 'truth' and 'falsity' are fundamentally values," while a few lines further down he is assured in the opening paragraph of Professor W. R. Wells's article that "a confusion between the value and the truth of religious beliefs is so characteristic of the pragmatic way of thinking in the field of religion that it may properly be labeled the pragmatic fallacy." Thus what one philosopher regards as the conclusion of a cogent train of reasoning is treated by the other as a mere confusion,¹ and the skeptic and the scoffer obtain another signal

¹ Another, very similar, example occurs in the next number (Vol. XIV., No. 26). In the course of what appears to me a very confused and confusing discussion about the pragmatic theory of values, one of the disputants declares that "the fundamental incoherence of the pragmatic value theory reaches its culmination in its discussion of the fundamental issue 'value and existence.' When the pragmatist says, often in the same breath, existence is a value and value is an existent, is it not just because here, as elsewhere, he moves back and forth within the magic circle of the 'specific situation'?" (p. 705): the other retorts "the statement that 'existence is a value and value is an existent,' which Professor Urban attributes to pragmatists, is . . . pragmatically quite meaningless, and I have been unable to locate it in pragmatic literature" (p. 712). Now both of these pronouncements must be painfully embarrassing to one who has been arguing ever since 1897 that truths are essentially values and that no absolute antithesis between value and fact is tenable. Nevertheless candor compels me to supply Professor Urban with the references to confute Mr. Schneider withal. He should look up *Humanism*, pp. 55, 162-163, and this JOURNAL, Vol. XII., p. 686, and Vol. XIV., pp. 456, 653. In return for this service he might tell me what, if

illustration of flat contradiction among the doctors of philosophy to justify their doubts whether philosophy is, or can ever become, a science.

Now as all will agree that such incidents are far too common in philosophic literature and that it would be a good thing to check their repetition, I propose, not merely in the interests of pragmatism, but for the credit of philosophy in general, to examine the "confusion" Professor Wells has detected, and to endeavor to clear away this particular stumbling-block in the path of the student who is willing to explore a somewhat wild and unfrequented, but highly interesting, portion of the philosophic field. It will, I think, speedily appear that the "confusion" is not to be laid to the charge of pragmatism, but is a natural growth of the human mind which has its roots in one of the deepest and most pressing of the problems that beset it.

By way of approach it will be well to recall that pragmatism professes to be, in the first instance, a new analysis of human knowing. Its specialty, which has rendered it so unpopular in academic circles, has been to drag ruthlessly into an unwelcome glare of publicity a large number of psychological procedures of the human mind which do not look very respectable or flattering to human vanity, and had been overlooked, or tacitly ignored, by the traditional accounts of knowledge. It was widely felt, therefore, that it was not *good* thus to uncover the *parties honteuses* of the human mind, and that pragmatism was playing the *enfant terrible* in a way no zeal for *truth* could excuse.

Among the problems thus dragged to light, though apparently one of the most respectable and innocent of them all, was that of the connection between truth and value. The unsophisticated empiricism of the pragmatists observed that though in the abstract these notions seemed to be quite distinct, yet there existed a close connection between them in fact, and that all but the most critical thinkers (to wit, themselves) were wont to pass, in the most facile and apparently inconsequent way, from desires, wishes, postulates and judgments of value to affirmations, confident beliefs and other forms of truth-claim. Here then was a new problem, a procedure so common as to be almost universal, which had never been adequately studied. What was its explanation or its justification? The old logicians, if they had noticed it at all, had dismissed it with a few anything, he means by the "fundamental incoherence" of my theory. And, like Mr. Schneider, I can not for the life of me see what it has to do with "the magic circle of the specific situation." In the specific situation I perceive, there is no magic circle, but only an urgent need to clear up the relation of truth to value.

words of cursory condemnation, and had simply taken it for granted that nothing of logical interest or value could result from such a process. But to the pragmatists the case did not appear quite so simple; they insisted on its anomaly, importance and significance. Their reward has been to have this common human failing specifically named after them, "the pragmatic fallacy." That seems a little unjust, but no doubt they deserved the fate of all innovators. If they did not wish to be misunderstood, they ought to have made their point clear to the meanest intelligence. They should have carried their analysis much further. They should have explained, more precisely and in exhaustive detail, the ways in which this common "confusion" arises, the part it plays in the struggle for existence of opinions, and the influence it has had over the selection of what are now the accepted "truths": and it is as a tardy and partial contribution to such an explanation that this paper may best be regarded.

It is obvious, in the first place, that it is quite impossible to separate the topics of truth and value entirely. So soon as it is noticed at all that every truth has to be born into the world, *i. e.*, has to have a genesis in a mind that is prompted to affirm it, it is clear that this mind must attribute *value* to it. It must have discovered its "truth" in a purposive process of attention, research or inquiry, which interested it and promised a *valuable* result.

The truth itself moreover must always include a logical claim to *greater value* than that possessed by any rival, *i. e.*, any alternative judgment about the same subject. For had a better (*i. e.*, more valuable) judgment been possible, it would inevitably have been preferred. Not that we need contend that *all* the logical possibilities are always present to consciousness. There are often, and indeed usually, psychological alternatives, out of which the judgment made is chosen, but that there should be is not a *sine qua non*, and does not affect the logical character of the judgment as the product of a choice of the best available. For in cases where the maker of the judgment has decided hastily and without due consideration of alternatives, these may be mooted subsequently, and if any of them then appear to him to be superior in value, he must withdraw his original judgment and substitute the better one. Judgment therefore always implies a choice logically, even where there has been no psychological consciousness of choosing.

This analysis, which is formal and quite general, evidently applies to all judgments or truth-claims, irrespective of whether they are true or false in fact, and is a demonstration that there is a value-claim in every truth-claim. The fact that the claim is *latent* should be for philosophy a reason, not for denying, but for emphasizing, it.

This conclusion naturally leads on the question—what then is the connection between value and truth? Once this question is raised a number of reasonings will be found to converge upon the answer that the true is a *species* of the genus “value,” along with the right, the good, the beautiful and the pleasant, whereas the false is the term for the corresponding negative value, like the wrong, the ugly and the painful. It then easily follows that logic is (or should be) the study of the value-claims which occur in cognitive operations, and that “truth” is to be defined as “logical value,” while “error” and falsity fall into line as the terms for the negative values which frustrate the attainment of their positive counterparts.

So far everything has been plain sailing. The first complication arises when we observe that value-claims are not always valid and that the value claimed is not always possessed; or, in other words, that what claims to be true may be false and be recognized as such by some, or even (retrospectively) by all. For we now get a number of parties to the case, and a discrepancy or dispute between those who claim the value and those who reject the claim. No logical analysis, therefore, which does not *distinguish* between these two views or attitudes can possibly be adequate. There is a logical dispute in which both sides claim to be right, and the logician has to arbitrate; his first duty therefore is to listen to both sides, and not to prejudice his function by prejudging the issue. The first thing he should say, therefore, is that when a judgment is in dispute it can no longer be called “true” or “false,” simply; it is “true” for the one side, “false” for the other. It is necessary, therefore, to *distinguish the persons* who are concerned with it, and to specify *for whom* it is “true” or “false.” Moreover, since the judgment can no longer be described as true (or false) without begging the question, the logician, as a neutral adjudicator in a cognitive dispute, should most carefully avoid doing so. If he does not, he falls into what may be called the *Fallacy of Ex Post Facto Wisdom*, to which all logic has habitually been addicted, because it has always assumed that the personality of the knowers could be abstracted from in giving an account of knowledge. Professor Wells falls into this fallacy when he declares that “in many cases beliefs that are clearly false still have obvious value for those who hold them as true.”² Here “clearly false” is evidently an *ex post facto* description. When the incriminated belief was formed it was clearly not held to be “false,” but believed to be “true”; its falsity was discovered later. Hence even if its falsity is now acknowledged, and its former advocates are now convinced of the erroneousness of their belief, the description

² Also on p. 654, “it is a fact that false religious beliefs have possessed value in the course of history.”

of it as "clearly false" transfers to the original judgment a valuation due to subsequent enlightenment, and confounds the cognitive situation before and after the tests which upset the original truth-claim. It is clearly wisdom after the event.

However it is not clear that Professor Wells was thinking of a case where the author of an "error" himself corrected and retracted it. He appears to be thinking rather of cases where conflicting valuations continue to coexist, and "clearly false" beliefs "*still* have obvious value for those who *hold* them as true" (not "*held*"). If so, he is committing a second offense, which may appropriately be labeled the *Fallacy of Confounding the Persons*. This fallacy also is very common in the traditional logic, and ought to be as serious a sin in logic as in the Athanasian Creed. For it ignores the essential fact that where there is a *dispute* about a belief there are *two* parties to it, whose positions logic should distinguish. If we make bold to disregard those who are still inquiring, doubting, hesitating or vacillating about the belief, and consider only the primary parties to the dispute, there are (1) those who believe it, and (2) those who don't. It is only to the former that the belief can have "obvious value"; and they of course also believe it to be true, *i. e.*, to have *truth-value*. The others, for whom it is clearly false, do *not* attribute truth-value to it, and do not think that the value it has for its believers is truth-value. For themselves it has *no* value; though, if the believers are in a great majority and insist on conformity, it may be valuable to *pretend* to believe it; the value-claim of this pretense, however, is for export only. The most a disbeliever could say to himself would be, "if only I could believe it to be true, it would make me happier" (or better). But this value he could not attain so long as he denied its truth, and, until he has sunk deep into the mire of self-deception, he is well aware of it. Consequently we do *not* get in *either case* a real divorce of truth and value. For the believers this belief has truth-value, as well as other sorts of value; for the disbelievers what has happened is that a non-cognitive value has vitiated the intellect of the believers, or has been erroneously taken to be truth-value.

The chief reason why this situation has not been understood, and why it has seemed natural to hold that false beliefs are valuable, is that the rulers and teachers of mankind have made such extensive use of lies as an instrument of government. Desiring men to believe what they considered *good* for them (or for themselves), they have been in the habit of imposing on them beliefs which they themselves were often far from sharing. They thus fabricated an artificial divergence between the true and the good-to-believe, and extensively

debased the intellectual currency. Consequently, when pragmatism brought up the connection between truth and value as a scientific problem, it seemed to all such persons natural to regard pragmatism merely as a theoretic recognition of what they had been doing, as an avowed extension into philosophy of practises that had long been in vogue in religion and politics. I can remember that in its editorial comments on the second general election of 1910 the London *Times* declared that both sides had shown an unusual amount of "pragmatism," and that it would not accept correction when it was attempted to explain to its able editor that pragmatism was *not* a synonym for lying. But it is the mental confusion engendered by the prevalence of lying for a purpose which accounts for the widespread belief in a natural antagonism of the true and the good, and the conviction that "value has a field of its own"³ into which truth does not enter, will probably persist, even though the argument for the separation or complete independence of truth and value breaks down when the case is completely analyzed.

It breaks down, even if we draw Professor Wells's own conclusion from his premises, that since false beliefs may have value, "the argument so commonly used that, since certain beliefs possess value for the believers, they are therefore true, is seen to be unsound."⁴ For here again the persons are confounded. If we fill in the reference to those concerned, we can only infer, either that since the beliefs "possess value for the believers they are therefore true" *for them*, which is a tautology, or *for the others*, which is a *non sequitur*, and probably untrue. For why should a belief which is good for *A*, because he believes it, be good for *B*, who does not? If what is meant is that beliefs are like tonics and may be imbibed like medicines, and that *B* would benefit like *A*, if he would only take to *A*'s belief and try it, this should be stated plainly. It may put us back on the logical level of Mill's "village matron" who prescribed the cough-drops which had benefited her Lucy to her neighbor's Polly, when she had broken her leg: but it is to raise a new and different issue, that of the psychological art of growing beliefs, concerning which there is much to be said. And in any case *B* would *ex hypothesi* have had to abandon his former belief in order to acquire the new one.

Our analysis, so far, has come upon nothing that need constrain us to question the conviction that by the value of a belief is meant essentially its truth-value: but we have now to call attention to facts which may force us to regard this assumption as over-simple. If it is a fact that truths are a kind of value, we should be prepared to find that their kinship with the other sorts of value is recognized by lan-

³ *L. c.*, p. 653.

⁴ *Ibid.*

guage and that the vocabulary of valuation should be to a large extent common and interchangeable. Accordingly we find this to be the case. We no more hesitate to say that an argument is *good* and *right* (ethical value), and that a piece of reasoning is *beautiful* (esthetical value), than, conversely, that a statue observes the *true* proportions, or that an enemy's nature is *false*. Is this at last the proof of the "confusion" between true and good of which pragmatism is accused? But is it not precisely the pragmatists who have drawn attention to it? And is it a confusion at all, when its significance is properly understood? For it is merely a metaphorical transfer of the specific value-terms from one value to another within the *genus* value, and this is hardly reprehensible, at all events when it is done consciously. The philosopher who desires to censure the practise, must be told to quarrel, not with pragmatism, but with language, and warned that but few of his tribe have shown themselves capable of mastering language.

It seems more reasonable then to recognize these interchanges of the vocabulary of valuation, and to inquire whether they do not mean something. They clearly mean, at least, that all values are commensurable, like the different currencies, and that therefore an inquiry may be opened into their proper, or actual, *rate of exchange*. We may legitimately ask how much pleasure-value is the equivalent of how much ethical value, or how much truth should be bartered for how much beauty. For that truth is beauty and beauty truth in some way is evidently not all a man has need to know, if he is also a philosopher. But whether or not he succeeds in regulating the exchange, he can understand its theory and observe its practise. For that such exchanges do occur is practically certain, to any one who deigns to watch the ways of men and the vicissitudes of beliefs. What alone is doubtful is whether they amount to a proof of what we may call a real *vicariousness of values*.

Here the inquiry begins to get into deep waters, and the philosopher who has been accustomed to feel firm ground under his feet, and has scorned to cope with the flux by learning to swim, may be warned to get out of it, lest he should presently find himself in a hole and get out of his depth. Well may he feel his stationary reason beginning to waver in her seat, when she encounters the suggestion that one belief may seem so beautiful or so delightful that it is generally accepted as true, while another is so hideous and so repulsive that it can not be seriously believed at all by mortal man: but if truth and not edification be the aim of philosophy and the value which it covets, the inquiry must proceed inexorably. As a concession, however, to the human prejudices of (even the austere) philosophers, let us drop the religious illustrations by which this prob-

lem is traditionally illumined. They have the advantage of exciting popular interest; but they are naturally invidious, because they excite strong emotions, for and against; they are also clogged with much irrelevant detail, and above all, they are not essential and indispensable. The question at issue can be argued with much simpler and clearer examples.

Let us examine, therefore, some non-religious cases of beliefs whose truth-claim is rejected for non-cognitive reasons: (1) Why are men so loth to believe that their whole life is a dream? Certainly *not* because they can disprove this suggestion, and show it to be false. The suggestion is very old; it was familiar to philosophers in the time of Plato,⁵ and from that day to this it has never been disproved. All the attempts to do so have been signal failures. Hence the rejection of the belief can not rest on intellectual grounds. What it does rest on is hard to say. We may conjecture that it rests on nothing more substantial than the affront to human vanity and self-importance which is thought to be contained in the suggestion that everyday life is not so real and earnest as the commonplace and unimaginative are wishful to believe. But if any one can offer a better reason, he is assuredly welcome to try.

(2) A still more striking case in some ways is that of solipsism. Here the rejection of the belief appears to be quite universal; but the reason can hardly be intellectual. For though there are several logical refutations of solipsism which are more or less successful,⁶ they are not familiar even to philosophers, and it is plain that the plain man has not heard of them; the universal reprobation of solipsism therefore does not rest on him. Neither does it rest on ordinary pragmatic grounds. Solipsism is not an impracticable doctrine; it is quite a harmless belief in practise, if the solipsist refrains from assuming that he must know in advance all that the creatures of his creative imagination are going to do. And what right has he to assume this? The real reason for rejecting solipsism appears to be esthetic. It would be a hideously lonely world, in which *οἱος πέπνυται, τοὶ δὲ σκίαι αἰσσοῦσι*, and the shock to our social instincts would be unbearable.

(3) But the crucial test, perhaps, comes in the case of pessimism. Again we get no intellectual refutation. In the mere matter of argument the pessimist can hold his own, and indeed generally gets the better of the optimist's reasons, though hardly ever of his bias. On the other hand, there is no optimistic argument which a resolute pessimist can not appropriate and pervert to his own ends. Nor is

⁵ *Theætetus*, 158B.

⁶ I have suggested one of them myself (*Humanism*, p. 249). It is the only one I can regard as adequate.

any pessimist ever converted against his will, and if he is convinced it is because he too feels the common human bias and at the bottom of his heart is as anxious as the optimist to believe that good may be the final goal of ill.

The real reason for the predominance of optimism and the rarity of pessimism is not rational, but biological. Pessimism constitutes the leading case of the discrepancy between truth-value and survival-value. In all its more pronounced forms the survival-value of pessimism is highly negative;⁷ it is a belief which is fatal to those who adopt it. In all but its most extreme (and fatuous) forms, on the other hand, the survival-value of optimism is positive, and though the amount of this value may often be exaggerated, it seems clear that optimism is an invigorating belief which tends to preserve, and indeed to increase and multiply, those who hold it. Hence all men are descended from those who have thought life worth living, and have inherited a bias in favor of optimism, and against pessimism, so strong that no truth-value can overcome it. Or rather their natural bias has so affected (dare we say, *vitiating*?) their intellect that it unhesitatingly and immovably affirms the truth-value of what is really nothing but the survival-value of the belief.

It follows that even if pessimism were true, its truth could never be established as a living belief in human minds. Pessimism may be taken as an extreme but typical example of a belief which has such negative survival-value that no amount of logical value could compensate for it and ensure its acceptance. The stronger its reasons were and the better it argued, the more it succeeded in convincing the reasonable who were open to conviction, the more certainly would it defeat the aim of its arguments. For the more certainly would it eliminate those who could feel the force of its argument, and the more it would strengthen the optimistic bias of the survivors; until in the end only those would survive who were too violently prejudiced, or too impenetrably stupid, to understand the case for pessimism.

It is clear then that pessimism can never be more than a sporadic phenomenon. A society of pessimists is a permanent impossibility of the cosmic scheme, even though the father of history has a pleasing yarn about the pessimistic customs of a Thracian tribe of his day.⁸ Among the Trausi, he assures us, it was the custom to condole with parents on the birth of children and to congratulate the chil-

⁷ It is quite compatible with this that a certain tinge of partial or conditional pessimism should be a reaction which the character of life naturally evokes in thoughtful minds and a practicable adjustment to its conditions, while extreme optimism, if acted on, would conduct to fatuities as fatal as those of ultra-pessimism.

⁸ Herodotus, Vol. 4.

dren on the death of parents. But this exception, if it was a fact, only proves the rule. The Trausi make their one and only appearance in history in this tale, and are never heard of again. It is evident that Herodotus must have snap-shotted their tribal pessimism just before it led to their extinction! But the lesson of their fate remains.

Do we not get then, in this case of pessimism, irrefragable proof of the power of other values to create truth-value? And was not pragmatism, though it did *not* identify survival-value and truth, quite right in tracing a connection between them and in refusing to declare survival-value utterly irrelevant to truth? Have we not discovered a fact of tremendous import? Must we not ask what limits can be set to its influence? If it is a fact that *some* truth-values are creations of survival-values, must we not ask how they are to be discriminated from the rest, and how much this fact should detract from their truth-value?

We shall have, moreover, to be cautious in our answers. For while on the one hand it would seem outrageous to hold that this makes *no* difference, we can hardly discredit survival-values altogether. The transition from *de facto* to *de jure* value is not a matter of course; but neither are they separated by an abyss. For if we utterly deny that it is rational and right to make this transition shall we not be setting up our private judgment against the laws of existence, and committing the very same offense as the pessimist? And will not our protest be as vain as his?

How vain is that, precisely? Is his protest logically worthless, because *he* is doomed to perish? Only, surely, if the logical standpoint is wholly absorbed into the personal—to an extent the extremest humanist may hesitate to take for granted. And even if that refutes the pessimist in the eyes of optimists, does it do so in his own? May not his elimination, which means his failure in the eyes of optimism, mean his success in his own? For he escapes from the life they value so differently; and what the optimist regards as his greatest loss he may account his greatest gain.

It is clear that there are many questions here which will have to be discussed with care, and many reasons why it should be wiser not to be too confident and absolute that survival-values can not determine truth-value. They plainly can in some cases, and the limits of their influence are quite indeterminate. It is even possible that ultimately and indirectly *all* truth-values are affected by the survival-value test. If so, it might even become necessary to equate truth and survival-value in principle, and to treat their apparent divergences as only superficial and temporary incidents in the consolidation of opinions. The matter cries out for further investiga-

tion. It is to be feared, however, that it will not get it. For it appears to be one of those questions which philosophers are reluctant to inquire into—for reasons not unlike those which render pessimism an unacceptable topic. These reasons do not appear to be *rational*; and if this is so, they will provide a further example of a belief whose “truth” is a value imputed to it, for reasons that are not intellectual. And it may be all the more valuable to urge philosophers to face such questions, and to undertake the analysis of such beliefs.

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SIXTEEN LOGICAL APHORISMS

I

A TRUE judgment and a false judgment have the same logical structure. This is of itself sufficient to show that an analysis of the forms of knowledge has no ontological significance. The nature of knowledge is the same, whatever may turn out to be the nature of the world. This position is one of armed neutrality, and stands ready to defend itself against both pragmatism and intellectualism.

II

All errors in epistemology may be reduced to one: the deliberate or unconscious confusion of the instrumentalities of thought with the objects of thought. Propositions which hold true of the former do not apply to the latter, and vice versa. The former are ideal entities (neutrals); the latter are reals. Even when the object of thought is an ideal entity, it is nevertheless a real with respect to the ideality by means of which thought apprehends it.

III

The subject-predicate relationship is universal—to judgments. All relations obtaining between the objects of thought of whatever kind, must and can be expressed, when known, through the subject-predicate relationship. This and all other noetic relationships constitute a neutral sphere, wholly indifferent in their unprejudiced transparency to the various real (anoetic) relationships which may be reflected through them.

IV

A thing both is and is not the sum total of its characteristics. A thing is described or known by its characteristics; but no sum or